



## Book Review

### **Prehospital Emergency Care: a Guide to Paramedics, 3rd edition**

J. ABBOTT AND M. J. GIFFORD

Carnforth, U.K.: Parthenon Publishing, 1996,  
£14.95, ISBN 1-85070-636-0

The importance of immediate treatment of potential life-threatening conditions in emergency medicine and severe trauma has brought the prehospital treatment into focus. Prehospital treatment is organized differently throughout the Western countries. The 'scoop and run' model, where the patient is minimally treated by trained rescue personnel at the scene, and priority is given to rapid transport to the hospital, is used mainly in the U.S.A. and U.K. In central Europe and partly in Scandinavia, the 'stay-and-play' model with treatment and stabilization by specialized physicians prior to transport is common. This diversity makes it difficult to write a textbook on the topic. This textbook is written to paramedics in the U.S.A. and the standards for care are based on the American Guidelines from the American Heart Association and the American College of Surgeons (Advanced Cardiac Life Support, ACLS; Advanced Trauma Life Support, ATLS, etc.).

The book covers emergency medicine and trauma protocols, adult and paediatric protocols, and environmental and hazardous material protocols. It is comprehensive, based on present symptoms and problems. It includes basic and advanced life-saving procedures and drugs. The authors emphasize the practical difficulty in working in the field, and the importance of treating life-threatening conditions immediately and before further assessment. There is good advice for handling situations, such as avoidance of guesswork on future outcome in the presence of relatives, and the importance of discussion of the grief of the rescue personnel.

The division of the chapters by letters, ABCD etc., does not seem appropriate, because the letters interfere with the uniform concept of the standard emergency and trauma protocols; A=airway, B=breathing, C=circulation. Therefore, numbering would be better.

Continuing in this terminology, the book gives a profound description of the protocols of ABC; however, the illustrations are not very suitable. A topic such as airway management demands detailed illustrations as given in textbooks in anaesthesiology. The text points out that the more simple methods of

handling an obstructed airway should be used before more complicated methods, and evaluation of the effect should be assessed immediately. Concerning advanced airway management, such as intubation and cricothyrotomy, I find that these procedures should be confined to medical, specially trained personnel. I wonder why the laryngeal mask is not mentioned at all, as this would be a suitable alternative in the hands of rescue personnel. As this textbook is aimed at paramedics, there is no discussion of anaesthesia for intubation, constituting the most important, immediate treatment in severe head injury. The standard cricothyrotomy is said to be contraindicated in children of 8 years and younger, as opposed to ATLS, where this limit is set to the age of 12 years. The more simple procedure of needle cricothyrotomy does not imply a practical description of how to perform jet-ventilation and the dosage of oxygen. The dilemma of the patency of the airway and the possible fracture of the cervical spine is discussed adequately. The authors show practical experience in their remarks, such as mentioning that vomiting is a major problem in handling the airways, and that it can occur in both the patient and the rescuer.

The topic of assisting ventilation is described in the chapter 'Prehospital procedures', whereas the dosage of oxygen is described in a special paragraph on oxygen in the chapter 'Prehospital medications', without reference between the chapters. An important detail is the emphasis of not withholding oxygen to patients with chronic obstructive lung disease, but to be prepared to assist ventilation.

Overall, the book is well written, and is suitable for its purpose as a guide to paramedics in the U.S.A. In addition, the book will be suitable for medical students as well as physicians and surgeons during their training in emergency medicine and traumatology, except for the lack of profound discussion on the topic of sedation, analgesia and anaesthesia in emergencies. The protocols, as stressed by the authors, have to be modified according to regional and organizing differences. Unfortunately, an alphabetic table of contents is missing, and there are few cross references.

However, a textbook can only form part of education – prehospital treatment has to be taught, especially in the field.

E. F. CHRISTENSEN